

Unit 4b: Foundational Beliefs--Russian Orthodox

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

Be aware of the following

- Self-governing nature of Orthodox Eastern Churches
- Orthodox emphasis on prayer and worship rather than doctrine
- Place of icons in Orthodox Eastern practice
- Theology of suffering
- Baptism and the Eucharist as the most significant orthodox sacraments
- Roman Catholic authority is the Bishop of Rome (Pope)
- Importance of the Seven Ecumenical Councils to Orthodox Eastern practice

Identify

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| • Ecumenical Patriarch | • Chrismation |
| • Great Schism | • Eucharist |
| • Icons | • Holy unction |
| • Theotokos | • Pope |
| • Jesus Prayer | • Homily |
| • Liturgy | • Sacrament |
| • Mysticism | |

Realize

- Importance of monastic communities with the orthodox tradition
- Observance of the church calendar in Orthodox Eastern practice

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- Place of fasting in the Orthodox Eastern tradition
- Seven sacraments of Orthodox Eastern practice
Different positions on church authority--
Orthodox Eastern and Roman Catholic
- Reasons for environmental concerns within orthodoxy

Unit 4b: Russian Orthodox Belief

1. Introduction Five major regions mark the territorial boundaries of the Orthodox Church. Over 200 million adherents belong to the church worldwide.



a. Muslim borders This church exists in ancient outposts in the Islamic world--Constantinople (Istanbul), Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.

b. Greek world Cyprus and Greece--where the churches trace their lineage to Paul and Barnabas--have a strong orthodox tradition. Greece is the only country where the orthodox faith is the official state church.

c. Romania and Georgia In Romania, with over 15 million members, and Georgia are non-Greek/Slavonic speaking churches.

d. Slavs Serbia, Bulgaria and Russia are home to the Slavonic Orthodox churches.

e. Other areas Finland, the Czech Republic, Western Europe, Australia, America and Albania round out those countries with churches affiliated with the orthodox tradition.

2. Practice

a. Self-governing churches "Autocephalous" describes the self-governing nature of orthodox churches.

While each church is independent of others, they possess full agreement on matters of doctrine. Full sacramental communion is practiced throughout the loose federation. Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Moscow are among the hierarchical heads.

No church has overall power, yet the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is seen as the "first among equals."

This historic center for orthodox practice is in ways similar to the Archbishop of Canterbury with the Anglican communion.

b. Leadership Priests serve as "spiritual fathers" to their congregations. At the parish level, priests may marry. Celibate bishops, drawn from monastic and other communities, minister at higher leadership levels.

Only males may serve at the altar as priests, deacons, or altar boys. Women participate in all other areas of church life--lead congregational singing, paint icons, teach classes, serve on parish councils and read epistle lessons.



Monastic communities enjoy healthy respect within the tradition. Monasteries remind the faithful of the depths of spirituality; keep the faith alive during difficult times; combat heresy; interrupt political influences; and provide sources for church leadership at higher levels.

Parish priests are addressed as "Father" with accompanying first name. The terms patriarch, catholicos, metropolitan or archbishop refer to senior bishops who normally serve in the primary city of the territory of influence. An archimandrite is a title of honor for priest-monks. The Ecumenical Patriarchate (Church of Constantinople) is headed by the ecumenical patriarch, an honorific title for the symbolic 'head' of the Orthodox Church.

3. Belief

"Orthodoxy is not just a kind of Roman Catholicism without a Pope, but something quite different..."

--Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church, p. 10

a. Break with Rome

Orthodoxy's break with the Roman Catholic Church stemmed as much from societal/political forces as from matters of doctrine. The great schism--where the Pope excommunicated the Orthodox--occurred in 1054.

As an outcome of the Council of Florence (1439), two central issues of disagreement--submission to papal authority in Rome and filioque (the doctrine that the Holy Spirit precedes not just from the Father but also from the Son)--galvanized the rift between the two communions.



Orthodoxy sees itself as being in continuity with the church since apostolic times, an outlook it continues to this day. It sees no Middle Ages, Reformation, or Counter-Reformation as part of its heritage. Rather, orthodoxy emphasizes a constancy with the church of the earliest ecumenical creeds and councils.

b. Teaching authority Orthodox and Roman

Catholic churches shared the same history for over half of their ecclesiastical life. While both bodies honor the same seven Sacraments, and see the interpretation of Scripture as the church's responsibility rather than of private interpretation, they differ significantly--especially in the following two areas concerning church authority.

(1) Seven Ecumenical Councils Eastern

Orthodoxy sees doctrine as mediated in the Seven Ecumenical Councils--all held before A.D. 787. Essentials of Christian belief, expressed in early creeds of the church and the Seven Councils, are relatively few. All other pronouncements--such as purgatory, indulgences, the Immaculate Conception, the assumption of Mary--which are held as doctrine by the Roman Catholic Church, orthodoxy sees as "innovations." Eastern Orthodoxy sees the church as continuing early church tradition rather than developing new dogma along the way.

(2) "Conscience of the Church" In Eastern

Orthodox practice, God's truth is mediated through the consensus of Christians. The Holy Spirit preserves right interpretation in the minds of Christians generally, focused in decisions gained collectively from bishops and patriarchs. Within Roman Catholic practice, what the pope proclaims is preserved from error by the Holy Spirit.

c. Corporate Church

Eastern Orthodoxy emphasizes the group rather than individual. Lives of Christians are interrelated in the "mystical body of Christ."



As pointed out by Huston Smith (The World's Religions, p. 354), this corporate significance demonstrates itself in the following.

(1) Personal salvation For orthodoxy, those whose concern is primarily with their individual, separate souls--personal salvation at the expense of everything else--miss the point of scripture and the church. Salvation comes in conjunction with other faithful adherents--the total church. Concern with being "born again" personally is selfish, overlooking the nature of the church at large.

(2) Environment Eastern Orthodoxy sees the whole universe as "groaning and in travail" (Romans 8:22), awaiting recovery. Through environmental concerns, the church helps reclaim nature, history and creation to a more purified state.



(3) People involvement Compared to the Roman Catholic Church, orthodoxy gives more honor to the decisions and input of congregation members themselves. Individual churches have a greater say in the selection of clergy. Outside of administration of the sacraments, the clergy/laity distinction is less pronounced.

d. Worship emphasis

The Orthodox Church tends to emphasize prayer and worship rather than doctrine. Theology becomes preeminently mystical and liturgical. God can only be apprehended--on a level beyond language, images and intellectual concepts--in a union of love. Matters of the Spirit take primacy.

e. Mystic bent Entering into the spiritual tradition from "within"--appreciating and experiencing the orthodox tradition within one's inner spirit--is an important dimension of orthodoxy.

Though not emphasized equally in Eastern Orthodox circles, this experience of direct communion with God expresses itself in the following ways.



(1) "Contemplation of God"

Suddenly feeling the presence of God while praying--facing, beside or within--becomes a highly regarded moment. Whether through the Sacraments, icons, or specific worship experiences, orthodoxy pursues an active interest in such mystical states. Monastics especially continue a tradition spanning close to two millennia which seeks such illumination.

(2) Ecstasy Initiated through the writings purported to be by Dionysius the Areopagite (ar-ee-AHP-ah-git), one of the converts during the Apostle Paul's ministry in Athens, believers are encouraged to meet God in some direct sense. In an ineffable way, God discloses the Trinity--God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit--through grace to the believer. Being taken out of our senses--ecstasy--comes. Sacramental symbols, the Bible, and Christ's mystical presence all become means by which adherents actively cultivate such states.

f. Icons

Icons--flat pictures bearing the image of Christ, Theotokos (Mother of God) or one of the saints--become aids to assist in this atmosphere of worship. The icon bestows honor upon the person represented by it. Images of Christ also reveal the God who became visible in the Incarnation.

Worship of God and veneration of the saints takes place through or across the icon images. Icons are objects of veneration [to be shown reverence] and honor...but not of real worship. Like pictures of individuals which serve as reminders--often in realistic ways--of famous persons or those dear to us, so icons can refresh the believer, stimulating acts of faith and piety.

Specialist James Dunlap, an Arabic linguist and member of the Orthodox Church in America, offers the following helpful information concerning icons.

(1) Visualized theological truth Icons give tangible demonstration that the "kingdom of God" is at hand. Crafted by faithful Orthodox artisans who undergo rigorous training and spiritual as well as technical discipline, icons remind us of the communion of saints.

Faithful saints from the past inspire our present. Pure life and genuine practice are goals we can, through grace, achieve. Becoming "living icons," a community of saints who assist others in their spiritual journey, becomes a noble aim.



(2) Mystical presence In certain ways, icons become the mystical embodiment of the presence of the Trinity. As the gold underlay illuminates an icon "from within," so a mystical emotive power radiates from the icon itself to the faithful. Icons thus become "windows to the heavenly."

g. Scripture The aesthetic emphasis applies to the Scriptures also. The Bible becomes a verbal icon of Christ, given a place of honor on the altar, carried in procession, kissed and venerated by the faithful. The faithful study it as much for its "religious feeling" as its literary or doctrinal structure.



h. Church year Within many Orthodox circles, Bible reading developed as a later addition to orthodox piety.

The clearest expression of spirituality was in daily observance of the church calendar. Fasts, saint's lives, veneration of icons, and the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist became most important.

i. Scripture translations

Controversies surrounding the Bible--its publication and distribution in former communist territorial churches--are commonplace. Many Orthodox churches tenaciously desire to preserve culture and tradition. Which translation is used becomes critical.

Political and theological church divisions, status of deuterocanonical books, competing Bible societies and organizations, and fears over linguistic 'corruption' and degradation of religious language all influence the uneasiness with which Bibles are published and distributed. Within orthodoxy, the Bible translation/distribution picture can become quite complex.

j. Suffering Orthodoxy places a heavy emphasis upon the theology of suffering.



For example, the official publication of the diocese of Montenegro, Svetigora, makes "the ever-increasing claim...that the Serbs are the 'New Israel,' the chosen people of God, a 'heavenly kingdom,' a martyr nation that has suffered more than anyone else on earth except Christ..." (Paul Mojzes, "The pro-Serb Montenegrins," Christian Century, 13 Dec 1995, p 1205). Other orthodox communions place a similar emphasis upon suffering.

4. Worship

"Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second."

-- Timothy Ware, The Orthodox Church, p. 282

a. Features Distinctive traits characterize the orthodox worship tradition. The service itself is marked by a sense of awe and wonder, accompanied with a feeling of informality and freedom.

The worshipper becomes like a child in his Father's house, rather than being a soldier on parade. Right praise--faith in the glorious Orthodox liturgy--becomes the distinguishing trait of the orthodox tradition.



b. Positioning Participants "stand up for Jesus" for most of the lengthy service. Rather than kneeling, worshipers can prostrate themselves, placing their hands on the floor and touching foreheads down between hands in the style of Middle-Eastern Muslims. Kissing--of the icons, chalice (communion cup for wine), edge of the priest's vestment, the cross throughout the service--is a regular part of the worship event.

Frequent makings of the sign of the cross (with right hand from right to left, ending at the heart) occur. Three fingers (the thumb and index/middle) symbolize the triune Godhead. The remaining two fingers recall the two natures of Christ, divine and human. The other hand on the stomach gives a blessing. Lengthy prayers and rites, and a great deal of singing also identify services.

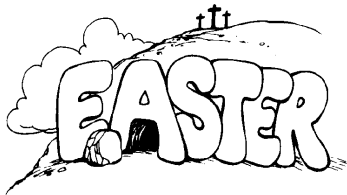
c. The Jesus Prayer Corporate prayer is a primary part of the liturgy. The 'Jesus Prayer'--"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner"--receives a great deal of attention. General sins are

usually omitted. Private confession before priests is the expectation for faithful adherents.

d. Fasting

Fasting, an exercise to stretch, strengthen, but not break one, is like medicine for the soul's health. A variety of fasting practices occur, most common being the abstaining from all food or drink prior to the sacrament of the Eucharist.

e. Liturgy The divine liturgy (public worship ritual) continues an ancient tradition. In both form and content, it embodies the earliest of Eastern worship rites.



The Easter season is the high point on the liturgical calendar.

The liturgy is both a source and expression of theology. It manifests the essential liturgical approach the orthodox take to religion. Liturgy promotes the orthodox tendency to be conservative practitioners of faith in an often changing world.

f. The Holy Mysteries (Sacraments--signs or ceremonies instilling grace). The following seven sacraments demonstrate, for Orthodox believers, the work of God's Holy Spirit in life and creation.

(1) Baptism--the rite of initiation into Christ and the Church

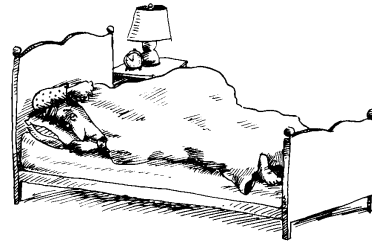
(2) Chrismation (KRIZ-may-shun)--occurs just after baptism, with the priest anointing with holy oil (chrism), symbolic of the seal of the Holy Spirit and welcoming the newly baptized into the church

(3) Holy Eucharist (YOO-kah-rihst)--receiving of bread and wine, changed to the body and blood of Christ by the Holy Sprit, for spiritual and physical nourishment

(4) Penance--act of reconciliation where the penitent, confessing and expressing sorrow for sins, and is declared right before God

(5) Marriage--crowns may be placed upon the bride and groom's head during this event, symbolic of blessing, martyrdom and membership in God's kingdom. Hands may also be symbolically bound to express the union of the couple.

(6) Holy Unction--
anointing of sick with oil and
prayer for spiritual and physical
healing



(7) Holy Orders--ordination rites to deacon, priest and bishop

The Holy Spirit is dramatically present to effect these sacraments, bringing the mystery of God to the forefront. Of the seven sacraments, Baptism and the Eucharist are the most significant. Infants receive baptism by triple immersion. Chrismation follows, whereby the priest anoints the baptized with oil, symbolic of reception of the Holy Spirit and entry into the church. Holy communion then follows, making the child a full member of the church.

g. Eucharist (communion) custom The church is first and foremost a eucharistic community. Orthodox alone can take communion. Before communion, the priest takes the round communion loaf, cuts out the middle section imbedded with a seal (the 'Lamb'), and sets it aside. He blesses and places the remainder (the 'antidoron') in a basket. During the eucharistic prayer, the "Lamb" is consecrated to be the Body of Christ, and the chalice of wine is consecrated as His Blood. The priest places the "Lamb" in the chalice, where it falls apart. Communicants receive the elements on a golden spoon. Participants can then receive portions of the "antidoron" for themselves, visitors or non-orthodox friends around them.

h. Beauty

The structure of the worship setting emphasizes divine beauty. Icons, emphasizing traditional and conventional Byzantine influence, reflect the divine character. This art stresses an established Greek design with faces, drapery, and gestures, which became such perfect symbols of Holy Truth that there appeared no need to depart from them. These images embodied the grandeur and majesty of an ancient art form.



"Use all of your brain."

Vocabulary List: Foundational Beliefs--Russian Orthodox

Autocephalous Self-governing nature of Orthodox Eastern churches. Each national church is independent of others, yet possesses full agreement on matters of doctrine and faith.

Chrismation (KRIZ-may-shun) When the priest anoints a newly baptized infant or adult with holy oil, symbolizing the seal of the Holy Spirit

Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople The "first among equals," the figurative head of Orthodox Eastern Churches

Eucharist (YOO-kah-rihst) Receiving the bread and wine, the presence of Christ, for reasons of obedience to Scripture and spiritual/physical nourishment, communion

Icon Flat picture bearing the image of Christ, Mary the Mother of God, or one of the saints

Liturgy Public worship ritual

Mass Roman Catholic celebration of the Eucharist (communion), a central part of each worship service

Patriarch Senior bishop within Orthodox Eastern practice

Penance Act of reconciliation, confessing sins, and sorrow for those sins, before being declared right before God

Pope Roman Catholic bishop of Rome, the one who governs church polity and practice

Sacrament Sign or symbol which instills God's special grace. The Orthodox Eastern and Roman Catholic Churches have seven sacraments.

Venerate To hold in high esteem, reverence or regard

Review Quiz: Foundational Beliefs--Russian Orthodox



Part 1--Fill in the Blanks Fill in the blanks with the most correct word from the list immediately following each section. All words listed might not be used.

The Orthodox Eastern church is (1)_____, having no one authoritative head like the Roman Catholic practice. The Ecumenical (2)_____ of Constantinople, however, is the "first among equals."

The Orthodox church tends to value prayer and worship rather than (3)_____. Theology is primarily (4)_____ and liturgical.

In Orthodox practice, (5)_____, while not objects of worship, are shown reverence and honor. They serve as aids to (6)_____, refreshing and stimulating the faithful.

Orthodox faithful place a distinct emphasis upon the theology of (7)_____. (8)_____, like medicine for the soul, serves to strengthen one's faith. The Holy (9)_____ offer Christ's consecrated body and blood to communicants in good standing with the church.

Pope
doctrine
fasting

worship
icons
Eucharist

Patriarch
suffering

mystical
self-governing



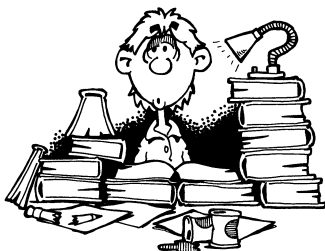
Part 2--Multiple Choice

Place the letter of the most correct answer in the blank provided.

1. _____ In the Orthodox Eastern tradition, women may not serve
 - a. as icon painters or readers of epistle lessons.
 - b. teachers and song leaders.
 - c. priests, deacons or altar servers.
2. _____ In Orthodox Eastern practice, icons
 - a. become objects of worship.
 - b. are aids to worship.
 - c. are works of art with little worship value in today's society.
3. _____ For many Orthodox Eastern Christians, the clearest expression of spirituality is in
 - a. Bible reading and study.
 - b. daily observance of the church calendar.
 - c. fastidious painting of icons.
4. _____ Concerning Bible translations, Orthodox Eastern churches
 - a. use whatever translation is most easily understood by the faithful.
 - b. may engage in much controversy over which translation to use.
 - c. use whatever translation is available because Bibles are so few.
5. _____ During most Orthodox Eastern services, parishioners
 - a. stand and prostrate.
 - b. sit and kneel.
 - c. sit and parade around the sanctuary.

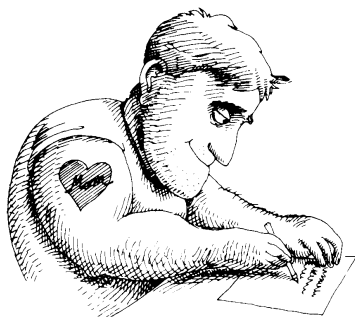
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6. _____ For Orthodox Eastern practice, Holy Unction involves
- a. a liturgy for the dying.
 - b. anointing of the sick with oil and prayer for healing.
 - c. the changing of the bread and wine into Christ's actual body and blood.
7. _____ As exemplified in Serbian Orthodoxy, and to a lesser degree in Russian Orthodox circles, Orthodox Eastern practice places a significant emphasis upon the theology of _____.
- a. Bible interpretation.
 - b. suffering.
 - c. women's ordination issues.
8. _____ Concerning salvation, Eastern Orthodoxy emphasizes _____ as uppermost.
- a. individual personal experience
 - b. the total church, with individuals as part of the church
 - c. personal salvation at the expense of everything else
9. _____ In orthodox worship, the divine _____ embodies earliest Eastern worship rites and cherishes ancient tradition.
- a. liturgy
 - b. antiocephalous preaching style
 - c. light
10. _____ Over _____ million Orthodox Eastern Christians practice the faith worldwide.
- a. 15
 - b. 200
 - c. 495



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(Available from Multifaith Resource Center, 45 Windy Hill Ct., Wofford Heights, CA 93285, Phone (619) 376-4691)



"Only by teaching can we truly prepare soldiers [sailors, airmen, Marines] to be successful and to survive in combat."
General John A. Wickham, Jr.